

In the name of 'War': Buhari's National Re-Orientation Campaign

Hodhan Jibril

This September, Nigeria entered into a new type of conflict, the 'War Against Indiscipline' (WAI). The Muhammadu Buhari administration has begun implementing a National Re-Orientation Campaign, a controversial social adjustment policy aimed at all Nigerians. With the slogan 'Change Begins with Me', the President introduced a broad agenda to correct the country's "badly eroded" value system (Buhari, 2016). Buhari, at the launch of the campaign, portrayed the plan as a solution that tackles the heart of the problems facing Nigeria today, ranging anywhere from electoral fraud to bad driving (Buhari, 2016).

President Buhari's return to power comes at a period of uncertainty for Nigeria. Having won the presidency on a platform of anti-corruption, Buhari faces increasing pressure to fulfill campaign promises. Aisha Buhari, first lady and his wife of 25 years, can be counted amongst his harshest critics. In a recent interview with BBC (2016), she suggested that the President "does not know" those appointed to senior positions in the government, leading to an administration that has effectively been hijacked from her husband. President Buhari, while participating in a press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, responded with the statement, "I don't know what party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen" (2016).

Although Mrs. Buhari is not alone in her concerns about the President, corruption is only one of the problems facing Nigeria. The UNDP Endpoint Report on Nigeria (2015), identifies some key security and environmental threats to the country's stability, such as the rise of Boko Haram in the North-east and nation-wide flooding respectively. According to the World Bank's Nigerian Economic Report (2015), the decline in oil prices has stunted economic growth and slashed government revenues. Nigeria will soon need to find the fiscal capacity to simulate job creation and mitigate poverty levels. (NER, 2015)

In the past, Nigeria has proven its ability to counter some of these challenges when government policy was employed effectively. Under the previous Goodluck Jonathon administration, Nigeria was able to reduce hunger 66% by 2012 through government policies that boosted farming productivity (UNDP, 2015). In 2013, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Director General José Da Silva praised Nigeria saying, "you are proof that when societies decided to put an end to hunger, when there is political will from governments, we can transform that will into action".

Reduced government revenues, however, has severely compromised the ability of government to intervene. In that context, Buhari's 'War on Indiscipline' attempts to respond to the environmental, economic and security issues within Nigeria, while faced with the realities of grave budget cuts. The National Orientation Agency, the organisation leading the volunteer WAI task force, has encouraged members to keep a watchful eye on both their local governments and fellow Nigerians, in an move towards "building a secure society" (NOA, 2016). The Nigerian government's increased involvement in the lives of its citizens means more bodies required to police them, but, using a voluntary scheme, reduces the need for Government spending to do so.

This is not the first time that Buhari has implemented this policy. From 1983-1985, Buhari's military leadership utilized a similar policy, resulting in an administration plagued with accusations of arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on freedom of expression and the media (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In the name of the 'War', organized queues for the bus were enforced by whips, and tardy civil servants penalized with public frog jumps (BBC, 2011). The disproportionality of the punishments under Buhari's first attempt at this policy raises concerns on its re-introduction this year.

According to Mausi Segun of the Human Rights Watch (2015), "Nigeria faces serious economic, social, and security challenges in the years ahead, and the real test for Buhari's new administration will be to address the challenges while respecting human rights." In the face of mounting criticism, the coming months will tell whether the decision to re-instate the 'The War against Indiscipline' represents the start of a new anti-corruption Nigeria under Buhari, or simply a continuation of his infamously troubled previous administration.

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